Force XXI Battle Command Brigade developed by TRW Tactical Systems Division. The award was accepted by (from left to right) Tom Carter, Hal Hart, John Dowdee, Lt. Gen. (Ret.) Otto Guenther, and Clark Lewis.

CrossTalk Presents Top 5 Awards at Software Technology Conference

Standard Terminal Automation Replacement System developed by ATB-230 STARS Product Team. The award was accepted by Alan Feinberg.

The winners of CrossTalk's 2001 Top 5 U.S. Government Quality Software Projects were presented with their awards at the 2002 Software Technology Conference (STC) held recently in Salt Lake City. Lt. Col. Glenn A. Palmer, program director for Computer Resources Support Improvement Program at Hill Air Force Base, introduced the representatives from each project to more than 2,200 STC conference attendees at a morning co-sponsors' panel discussion. Joe Jarzombek, deputy director of Software

Higher Authority Communications/Rapid Message Processing Element developed by Detachment 1, Ogden ALC. The award was accepted by SrA Joshua Babcock (left) and Captain David Selnick (right).

System Configuration Set 15C developed by F/A-18 Advanced Weapons Lab. The award was accepted by Keith Heflin.

Data Capture System 2000 developed by Lockheed Martin. The award was accepted by Sean Murphy.

Information Insurance

Yeah, I know. The topic of the issue this month is Information Assurance. So either I can't spell very well, or I don't know the difference between *insurance* and *assurance*. Actually, both words pretty much mean the same. In fact, I remember a door-to-door salesman that was trying to sell me a policy years ago. He said, "With our insurance, you have the assurance that your loved ones will be well taken care of."

Remember the days of door-to-door salesmen (and saleswomen)? Funny how you reminisce about strange things. My mother always felt sorry for them and wanted to invite them in for something to drink and a piece of cake. I can hear her now, "That poor man, trying to make a living in this heat." My dad, on the other hand, was more of a "thanks but no thanks" then shut-the-door-in-their-face type of person.

You understand, of course, that those same people who used to come to your door now work as mass marketers for some company on the Internet. I mean, after all, why spend your time going to one house at a time, when you can instead, in just a few short keystrokes, affect the lives of 20 million people with "spam" mail.

Spamming e-mail is, unfortunately, habit-forming. You used to get the e-mail spam only from salespeople interested in refinancing your house, getting you to change Internet companies, or something similar. Now, every business seems to think that sending out e-mail to everybody they know will somehow make their company successful.

I've traveled a lot and can usually count on five to 10 spam messages per day while on the road. Unfortunately, I also am stuck with slow hotel-speed modem connections, so it's pretty well guaranteed that anybody who sends me a three megabyte file of cute graphics and color is going to clog my mail program. Of course, this usually happens when I am in a hurry and need to download something important.

HEY, COMPANIES THAT ADVERTISE BY SENDING OUT MASS E-MAIL, DO YOU WANT ME TO BUY FROM YOU?? Then send me an e-mail saying, "Company XXX will never advertise on e-mail to you, even though we have your address." Send it as a text file, about 1K in length. Trust me – if you send a large file with lots of graphics, I'm going to tell everybody I know that whatever product you sell sucks swamp water.

Sorry. I got off the subject for a minute, but I feel "much better now." The title of my column is called "Information Insurance." I am about to create a column that system administrators will be posting worldwide, because I'm about to warn you who is responsible for insuring that your data is "safe." You are.

I had the misfortune of having two separate laptops crash on me within the last three months. In both cases, there was a hardware failure and the hard drive "went to the data graveyard in the sky."

In both cases, our local system administrators were able to set me up with a new machine and new operating system within a day (thanks, again, Randy and Geoff). In both cases, all of my data on the old machine was lost. Was I really upset? Not too much. Why? Because I usually burn a weekly CD to back up all of my data. Total work lost each time? About three days of file updates.

To quote an old television commercial, "It's 10 o'clock. Do you know where YOUR [data] are?" Let me be honest; do you think that your system administrators really have nothing better to do than perform instantaneous backups of your data? You know, the system administrators are busy just keeping the network running and installing the patches, updates, new drivers, and other essential software. If they do have time to perform backups, do you know how often? And what if your machine dies just before the next scheduled backup?

To be safe, you need to perform regular backups on your own. You don't need to save everything, of course – too much room. In fact, it used to be that all of my "critical" data could fit on a few floppies. Now, my cartoon collection (which is absolutely critical for my PowerPoint slide presentations) takes up about 100 MB. Luckily, the cartoons don't change much, so once a CD is burned, that backup is good for months. If you don't perform personal regular backups of your critical data, then what critical files are you going to be missing when a recovery is done?

In short, this column should serve to remind you that information assurance is not just something at a global level that affects large-scale software. Information insurance is sort of like personal information assurance. Just like real insurance, it helps you rest well at night, secure in knowing that you have protected those (files) dear to you.

By the way – you are lucky that we have had too many Backtalk columns in recent months that were takeoffs on songs. The old Baptist hymn "Blessed Assurance" kept running through my head, and I really think I could work up a great set of data-based lyrics. Whoops; the editor says I'm out of space – too bad.

– **David A. Cook**
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Software Technology Support Center

Intensive Systems Office of the Secretary of Defense/AT&L, the department sponsoring the contest, presented the awards.

The intent of this search was to recognize outstanding performance of software teams and to promote best practices. These Top 5 project winners were selected from 87 nominations in this first government-sponsored event. Each nomination was preliminarily scored based on customer value, performance, and technical value. The customers of the highest scoring projects were then contacted to ensure their satisfaction with the nominated projects. Using this information, the top 16 projects were chosen as finalists and sent to a board of judges who selected the top five software projects.

Complete articles on each winning project were published in the January 2002 issue of CrossTalk, *The Journal of Defense Software Engineering.* This, and other back issues, can be found on the CrossTalk Web site at <www.stsc.hill.af.mil/crosstalk>.

CrossTalk is now accepting nominations for the 2002 Top 5 contest. Applications are available at the Web site listed above or at <www.stsc.hill.af.mil>.◆